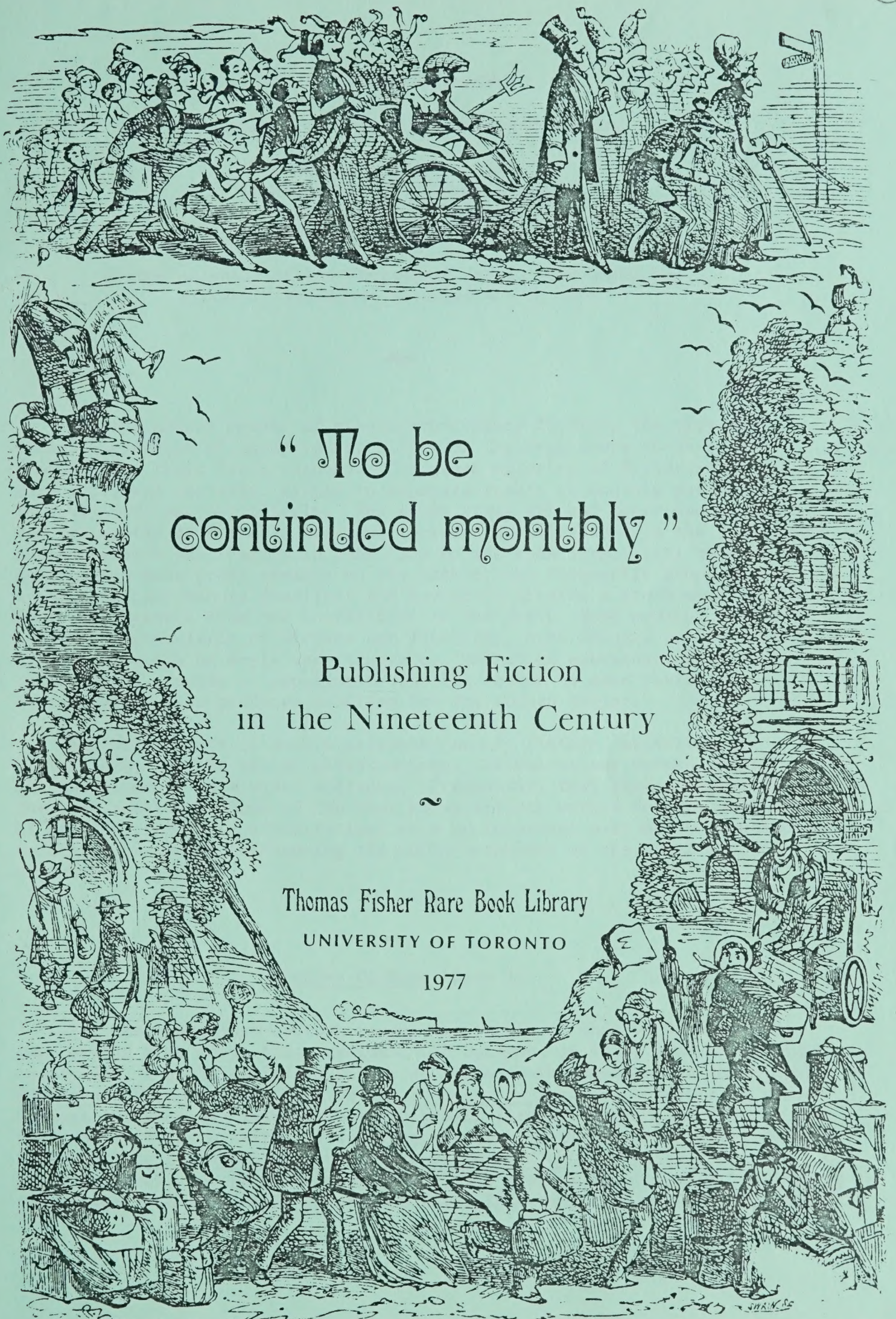

"To be continued monthly"

Publishing Fiction in the Nineteenth Century

~

Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
1977

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"TO BE CONTINUED MONTHLY"

Publishing Fiction in the Nineteenth Century

An Exhibition at the
Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library
University of Toronto
November - December 1977

On the occasion of the Thirteenth Annual Conference on
Editorial Problems, November 4 - 5, 1977

For the modern reader of nineteenth-century fiction, the tidy one-volume paperbacks of today convey little of the experience these works provided for their first readers. The great majority of Victorian novels were published serially, either in separate weekly or monthly parts, or in newspapers and periodicals. The major firms all had their own magazines and frequently an author's contract included serialization in the periodical and subsequent publication in book form by the same firm. This type of publication made great demands on the author, who frequently found himself writing to last minute deadlines and having to provide a story which would carry his readers from one installment to the next. Some modern critical studies, particularly of Dickens and Thackeray, have focused on the effect of serialization on style and structure. And since subsequent book publication might provide an opportunity for the author to make revisions, serialization also produces problems for the modern editor.

Another feature of much nineteenth-century fiction, especially in serial form, was the use of illustrations. Illustrations helped to sell the installments to a wider audience. Frequently, they also appeared in the book editions. Some of the best known artists worked for the publishers of fiction, and their illustrations were an important part of the contemporary reading experience, influencing the public's concept of the novel and its characters.

Charles Dickens (Case 1)

For the nineteenth-century reader the novels of Charles Dickens were inseparable from their illustrations. In December of 1833, when he was just twenty-one, a piece called "A Dinner at Poplar Walk" appeared in the Monthly Magazine. This was the first of the Sketches by Boz. As a result of their success, Dickens was asked by the publishing firm of Chapman and Hall to provide the text for a series of sporting pictures to be drawn by Robert Seymour. The resulting Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club very quickly outgrew their original concept developing into a full scale work of fiction. Pickwick Papers appeared in monthly parts from April 1836 to November 1837, and estab-

lished his permanent popularity with the reading public. After Seymour's unfortunate suicide, Hablot Knight Browne ("Phiz") took over as artist. He was to provide fine illustrations for Dickens' novels for the next twenty years.

During these early years of his career Dickens was involved in a great range of writing and publishing activities. While Pickwick Papers was still being published, he took on the editorship of the new Bentley's Miscellany and in the second number (February 1837) began the serialization of a quite different work of fiction, Oliver Twist, with illustrations by George Cruikshank. With the assistance of Chapman and Hall he was able to buy back the copyright of the Sketches from their original publisher, and they were re-issued in twenty monthly parts beginning in November 1837 with the plates re-engraved by Cruikshank in a larger size. In April 1838 another new novel Nicholas Nickleby began publication, and so popular had its author become that he was paid £150 a number, ten times what he had received for Pickwick two years before.

Except for Hard Times which appeared in Household Words in 1854, and A Tale of Two Cities and Great Expectations published in All the Year Round in 1859 and 1860-61 respectively, both periodicals which Dickens himself edited, publication in separate monthly parts was the usual mode for his later novels. Sometimes more than one form was for sale concurrently. Chapman and Hall's advertisement for Master Humphrey's Clock (1840) states:

> A Number of this Work will be published regularly
> EVERY SATURDAY MORNING,
> PRICE THREEPENCE.
>
> It will be handsomely printed in Imperial Octavo, and illustrated with Engravings on Wood, from designs by GEORGE CATTERMOLE, and HABLOT BROWNE.
>
> It will also be published in Monthly Parts, price One Shilling, and in Volumes at regular intervals.

Finally, toward the end of his life Dickens developed a way of reaching his audience unique among Victorian novelists, his highly dramatic public readings. Into them he poured the same energy and enthusiasm that had characterized his whole working life.

William Makepeace Thackeray (Case 2)

When Thackeray's best known novel Vanity Fair began to appear in monthly parts in January 1847, its author had had a rather uneven career of over ten years writing fiction and essays under a variety of pseudonyms and personas. The Yellowplush Papers had originally appeared in Fraser's Magazine in 1837 and 1838. The Paris Sketch Book (1840), Comic Tales and Sketches (1841), and The Irish Sketch-book (1843) all by "Mr. Michael Angelo Titmarsh," and The Book of Snobs (1848) "by one of themselves" were made up of earlier

contributions to a number of different periodicals. His novel The Luck of Barry Lyndon had been serialized in Fraser's in 1844. But Thackeray was dissatisfied with it and it did not appear in book form in England until 1856 when Thackeray made extensive revisions. (These changes are demonstrated in Martin J. Anisman's critical edition of 1970.)

Like other novels written under the pressure of serialization, Vanity Fair contains a number of errors and inconsistencies which have been pointed out by modern editors. In his introduction to the Penguin English Library edition, J.I.M. Stewart quotes a letter which amusingly demonstrates the dilemma of the novelist writing to a deadline. Thackeray begs a certain Major Compton of the Indian infantry to call on him as soon as possible:

> I have a chapter about Madras in V F and dont want to make any blunders ... I shall dine at 4 o'clock if you will eat a hasty morsel with my children & their distracted parent who is late with his months work as to be almost out of his mind.

In 1859 Thackeray was asked to edit Smith, Elder's new periodical Cornhill Magazine and to provide a novel to be serialized in the opening numbers. The result was Lovel the Widower which was published in Cornhill between January and June of 1860. But Thackeray modestly gave first place to another novel, Framley Parsonage by Anthony Trollope. Much of Thackeray's work was published in the United States by Harper's of New York, and his novels were sometimes serialized concurrently by Harper's either in their magazine or in separately published parts. Lovel the Widower appeared in Harper's New Monthly Magazine in 1860 one month after the installments in Cornhill. This pattern was repeated with Denis Duval in 1864, while The Virginians was published in monthly parts in England (1857 to 59) and in Harper's Magazine in the United States.

An additional feature of these first publications of Thackeray's novels, not often reprinted in modern editions, are the author's own lively and satirical illustrations which add greatly to the reader's view of his characters.

Charlotte Brontë -- George Eliot (Case 3)

George Smith, the senior partner of Smith, Elder, was one of the great nineteenth-century publishers. He succeeded to his father's share of the business in 1845 at the age of twenty-one after a formal apprenticeship which included every aspect of the business, even wrapping the parcels. Throughout his life he energetically promoted new authors and new ideas, most notably the creation of the Dictionary of National Biography. In his reminiscences, quoted extensively in Leonard Huxley's history of the firm, he describes how in July 1847 a parcel containing a manuscript, with the addresses of several other publishers already crossed out, arrived at the offices of Smith, Elder. The manuscript was "The Professor" by an unknown writer "Currer Bell" (Charlotte Brontë). On the advice of the firm's reader, the novel was declined, but its author was told that it showed

promise. This was the first encouragement she had received, and soon after she sent them the manuscript of another novel which they accepted. Jane Eyre was published in the same year 1847. Charlotte Brontë later visited London several times where she was the guest of George Smith and his mother. They provided the originals for Dr. John and Mrs. Bretton in her novel Villette, and she wrote to Mrs. Gaskell that she awaited Smith's reaction to this work with trepidation in case he had found her out.

George Eliot's principal publisher was John Blackwood of the Edinburgh firm of William Blackwood and Sons. In 1817 they had founded Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine (popularly known in the nineteenth century as "Maga") which is still being published. George Eliot's first work of fiction, her Scenes of Clerical Life, appeared in Blackwood's between January and November 1857. Blackwood's subsequently published nearly all her novels, two of them, Middlemarch (1872) and Daniel Deronda (1876), appearing first in eight monthly parts.

One novel, however, was published by Smith, Elder. George Eliot was at the height of her career in 1862, when George Smith was looking for a work by a major writer to bolster his periodical Cornhill. He offered her £10,000 (the most he had ever offered for a work of fiction) for a novel of specified length to be published in sixteen installments. But later she told him that the novel Romola would have to be published in twelve parts, that it would destroy it to divide it into sixteen. When Smith pointed out that this would place a greater financial burden on the monthly issues of the magazine, she agreed to a reduced payment of £7,000 rather than compromise her concept of the novel.

George Meredith (Case 4)

In his classic study of the English novel, Walter Allen remarks that the generation of novelists born in the 1810's--Dickens, Thackeray, Eliot--were essentially in agreement with the moral outlook of their reading public. But the later nineteenth-century writers became more critical of their society and its assumptions. George Meredith was among these younger novelists whose work was less suited to widespread serialization. His subtle and sophisticated style was never likely to be widely popular, and his novels lacked the strong plot that was necessary to hold a reader's interest from number to number. The majority of his novels did appear first in serial form, most frequently in the Fortnightly Review. His best known novel The Egoist was published in the Glasgow Weekly Herald, apparently against his wishes. In July 1879 Meredith wrote to Stevenson, "The diplomatic Kegan has dealt me a stroke. Without a word, he sold the right of issue of the 'Egoist' to the 'Glasgow Herald,' and allowed them to be guilty of a perversion of my title ..." (It appeared as "Sir Willoughby Patterne, the Egoist.") But contemporary reviewers seemed uncertain what to make of his work. Mrs. Oliphant, herself a prolific novelist, wrote of one of the more popular novels The Adventures of Harry Richmond, published in Cornhill in 1870-71,

that it was "not a novel in the legitimate three-volume sense of the word," but "a very odd and very clever book."

Meredith influenced the reading of fiction in another way when in 1860 he became literary adviser to Chapman and Hall, a position he was to hold for over thirty years. The role of literary adviser to a publishing firm in the nineteenth century carried more prestige than that of the modern publisher's "reader." Manuscripts were sent to Meredith's house in lots accompanied by a ledger in which he recorded his opinions. His standards were high, and he rejected a number of writers who were later to be very popular. But among the novelists whom he encouraged were Thomas Hardy and George Gissing. Hardy later described publicly how when his first novel, "The Poor Man and the Lady," already rejected with a lengthy criticism by Alexander Macmillan, was sent to Chapman and Hall, he was summoned to meet "our reader" and receive his advice personally.

Thomas Hardy (Case 5)

The conflict between the writer and public taste as perceived by the publisher, is more evident in the case of Thomas Hardy, particularly in the publishing history of Tess of the d'Urbervilles. In a brief preface to the first edition in 1891 Hardy wrote:

> The main portion of the following story appeared--with slight modification--in the Graphic newspaper; other chapters, more especially addressed to adult readers, in the Fortnightly Review and the National Observer, as episodic sketches. My thanks are tendered to the editors and proprietors of these periodicals for enabling me now to piece the trunk and limbs of the novel together, and print it complete, as originally written two years ago.

Tess had originally been intended for publication by Tillotson & Son of Bolton, Lancashire. In 1873 Tillotson's, already owners of several Lancashire newspapers, had established a Fiction Bureau to syndicate fiction to other provincial and national newspapers. The material was available to subscribers either in proof form or in stereotype, and in the 1880's and 90's the Bureau had an annual list of some thirty novels and several hundred short stories by some of the most popular writers of the day. It was a new and enterprising approach to the publishing of fiction which provided the author with a larger income and a broader public than the magazines could.

Hardy published several short stories through Tillotson's, and in 1889 contracted for a novel originally to be called "Too Late, Beloved." Part of the manuscript was sent to them and was already in proof when Tillotson's decided that it was unsuitable for the newspapers they supplied. In particular they objected to the seduction scene and Tess's midnight baptism of

her child. Hardy was unwilling to make the suggested changes and so the agreement was cancelled. He then offered the novel to two magazines who also turned it down. Finally he agreed to alterations which would make it acceptable to the weekly paper the Graphic, where it appeared between July and December 1891. The changes included a mock marriage to Alec d'Urberville in place of the seduction. The two objectionable scenes were separately published as "Saturday Night in Arcady" in the National Observer and "The Midnight Baptism, a Study in Christianity" in the Fortnightly Review, though without Tess's name. Tess was also published in Harper's Bazar in essentially the same bowdlerized version as in the Graphic. The three-volume edition published by Osgood, McIlvaine late in 1891 restored the novel to the form we know today.

Robert Louis Stevenson (Case 6)

Stevenson and Kipling both achieved wide popularity during their lifetime, partly because of the exotic settings of much of their fiction. Stevenson was a prolific contributor to periodicals, writing essays, travel pieces, reviews and poetry as well as novels and short stories. His travels in Europe, America, and the Pacific in search of better health provided material for his stories and essays. But they also complicated his relationships with publishers, particularly after he settled in Samoa in 1890. His letters to Charles Baxter, a close friend since college days and his business agent, were admirably edited in 1956 by DeLancey Ferguson and Marshall Waingrow. They provide a picture of the complexities of fiction publishing in the late nineteenth century and the added difficulties of writing so far from the publishing centres of London and New York. Even obtaining copies of the periodicals in which his work appeared was a problem. Soon after the Scots Observer edited by his friend W.E. Henley began publication in 1888, he wrote from Honolulu, "Ye see, Mr. Baxter, we're no just in the punkshewal centre of civ'lization. But pile them up for me ..." A chance discovery of a file of Blackwood's in the lawyer's office in Samoa enabled him to read Mrs. Oliphant's reviews of The Wrong Box and The Master of Ballantrae. In 1892 he begged Baxter, "When Falesá comes out in the Illustrated or whatever it is, do please send us a copy." Later the same year he complained that no one had thought to send him copies of Atalanta where his novel David Balfour was being serialized.

The Beach of Falesá had been sent to Baxter in October 1891 with instructions about publication:

> I have asked McClure to make you an offer for serial rights. If he offer less than £500, I am disinclined to accept; if less than £400, I refuse point blank. You should hear from him almost at once, and if he does not come to the scratch, it will be a fine problem what to do next.

Stevenson then goes on to suggest the other alternatives at some length, concluding:

> Awfully sorry to bother you with this; but McC. is so little of a businessman and so much of a splasher, that I do not care to send him the copy direct. My hope is, he will give the sum asked, and there will be no more bother.

Collecting the money owing him from American publishers was also a problem and the following year Stevenson was asking Baxter to see what he could do about his account with Scribner's.

While the South Seas provided the setting for The Beach of Falesá, The Ebb Tide and other stories of this period, Stevenson continued to write novels with a Scottish locale. Here again Baxter provided assistance, giving him advice on legal matters and sending him background material. For Weir of Hermiston, left unfinished at his death in 1894, Stevenson wrote:

> I return herewith Arnot (which unfortunately I already possessed) and Balfour's Letters, to see what you can get for them. I wish in exchange Life of Stair, life of Carstairs, Wodrow's Analecta, and life of Grierson of Lag, and Memoirs of General Hugh Mackay.

The dedication of another Scottish novel David Balfour is a tribute to his friendship with Charles Baxter and their common memories of "the venerable city which I must always think of as my home."

Rudyard Kipling (Case 7)

Kipling's acquaintance with writing for periodicals began very early. At about fourteen he contributed several stories to a magazine called the Scribbler "published" by the children of William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones in an edition of two copies written out by hand. Later he was editor of his school paper the United Services College Chronicle which published several of his stories and poems. When he returned to India in 1882, he joined the staff of the Lahore Civil and Military Gazette and began to write the stories which were later collected in Plain Tales from the Hills (1888). These early stories are very close to journalism and reflect the social life of the Anglo-Indian community in which Kipling was raised. While still in India, he also contributed several volumes of stories to a series called Wheeler's Indian Railway Library, beginning with Soldiers Three in 1888. These books were issued in cheap paper wrappers and sold for one rupee.

Several of the stories in these collections had not appeared in print before, and this pattern of combining published and unpublished material was one which Kipling followed throughout his writing career. Further

complicating the history of Kipling editions was his concern over copyright, particularly after the International Copyright Act of 1891 enabled him to copyright his own work in the United States. Many titles were printed in special copyright editions in Britain and the United States before they were made available for sale. Nevertheless his enormous popularity during his lifetime was a great temptation to piracy and unauthorized editions were numerous.

In 1889 Kipling returned to England and except for a few years spent in the United States, he lived there for the rest of his life. But India remained the main inspiration for many of his stories and for longer works like the novel Kim. First serialized in McClure's Magazine in the United States and in Cassell's in Britain, this work vividly created for its many readers the atmosphere of the India of Kipling's youth. But the short story remained his forte. The very popular Stalky & Co., based on his school days at the United Services College, was made up in part of a series of episodes originally written for the Windsor Magazine in 1898 and 99. In both style and subject matter Kipling's work was admirably suited to the popular forms of publishing of his day.

Yellow-Backs (Case 8)

Cheaper methods of book production, new forms of distribution, and a wider reading public all contributed to the spread of fiction in the nineteenth century. The "yellow-back" was a special feature of Victorian publishing. It was a cheap edition bound in paper covered boards, usually yellow, with an eye-catching picture on the front cover and the endpapers. Usually yellow-backs were fiction, but other popular subjects such as sports and natural history were published in this form. The development of the yellow-back was directly related to the building of the railways in the 1840's and the demand for reading material which this new mode of travel produced. In 1848 W.H. Smith & Son obtained the contract to supply bookstalls in all the stations of the London & North-Western Railway. The family had been stationers and newsdealers since the late eighteenth century, and they later operated a circulating library and other types of book outlets. (A book which was once in their subscription library is shown in case 4.) But in the second half of the nineteenth century the railway stalls were the backbone of their business. The first one was opened at Euston Station in November 1848. At the same time Simms & M'Intyre began publishing a series of cheap novels called the Parlour Library which had many of the characteristics of the later yellow-backs. They were immediately successful, and other publishers followed. Series titles like Routledge's Railway Library indicate the market for which they were intended. W.H. Smith themselves had yellow-backs published for them under the imprint of Chapman and Hall.

Some of the earliest detective fiction was published in the yellow-back format. Also popular were society novels, stories set in the "Wild

West" and Australia, and the historical novels of such prolific writers as G.P.R. James. Important novelists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were published in yellow-back editions, but the great majority were by writers now long forgotten. Yellow-backs continued to be an important form of publishing almost until the first World War. With their sensational covers, their popular appeal and their wide distribution, they anticipate the mass market paperback novel of today.

Like the modern paperback the yellow-back was a cheap edition not intended to last. Relatively few of these fascinating souvenirs of Victorian reading taste still survive. The ones shown in this case and elsewhere in the exhibition are part of a collection originally put together by a nineteenth-century collector, the Rev. Walter Scott of Stirling. The choice of subjects and authors reflects his own taste and many of the books contain his comments. As if to confirm Tillotson's opinion of Hardy's Tess of the d'Urbervilles, Scott wrote in his copy of Desperate Remedies published in 1891, "[Hardy's] works of fiction are powerful stories, but of late years somewhat unpleasant."

Elizabeth Hulse

The cover of this guide reproduces Hablot K. Browne's border for the monthly parts of Dickens' Little Dorrit.